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**Title: Re(de)ducing Sherlock Holmes Through Select Concepts of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud**

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**Synopsis**

Detective fiction is a typically nineteenth and twentieth century literary genre. It was only from the nineteenth century that novels and stories depicting crime, detection and its consequences came to be a distinct literary genre in Europe. The first originator of the early type of stories of detection was the American poet and short-story writer Edgar Allan Poe who created in April 1841 the world's first fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin, when *Graham's Magazine* published Poe's classic story *The Murders in RueMorgue*. However, for the next forty-five years the genre was largely neglected. Stories about detectives did not become truly popular, however, until *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887 published *A Study in Scarlet*, introducing to England and the world, the most flamboyant detective of all times – Sherlock Holmes, resident at 221B Baker Street, London.

The proposed research work would try to delve deep into the psychoanalytical aspects of the exploits of Doyle's protagonist, Sherlock Holmes: his deductive reasoning, how through the play of language he is able to bring out the underlying secrets of the criminal mind, and how he himself as a character can be analysed and critiqued from the standpoints of certain key concepts of contemporary philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and the most revered psychoanalytic theorist of all times – Sigmund Freud. If we trace certain ideas of Nietzsche through Holmes, we find that he himself is a perfect embodiment of some key Nietzschean concepts. For example, Nietzsche talks about the "Death of God" and the subsequent concept of *Übermensch*: modern science and developments have killed the "mythical" figure of God who used to be the Centre of Meanings and Provider of Values to systems and replaced Him with the producer of another set of values – the Superman, who brings with himself his own problems. During the peak years of his popularity (around 1891), we find that Sherlock Holmes as a character is very much rooted in his time and place, grounded squarely in Victorian London. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (published in 1859, which incidentally is the birth year of Conan Doyle) had already shifted the focal point of the world from God to Man. And with Nietzsche's ground-breaking concept of the "Overman" in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Conan Doyle seems to have coloured Holmes with the features of a human, battling against all set values and systems to create his own order. In that state of constant change in which he dwells, can his growth be traced. According to Nietzche, his superman has transcended the flaws of ordinary human nature, and is no longer affected by petty human beliefs and emotions. Holmes, very much like Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*, is a man possessing superhuman mental faculties: his exploits are too

fantastical to seem real all the time and his deductions which seem to come so easily to him cannot be accounted merely to the sharpness of a genius. The proposed thesis can use these concepts to explain further the patterns in his methods of deduction. Holmes seems to negate all that is traditional: his approach towards a crime scene can be seen as a perfect foil to that of the conservative approaches of Inspectors Gregson and Lestrade of the Scotland Yard. He relies only on science and logic sometimes guided by intuitions: any emotion which could entrap his secular mind was of deep repugnance to him. The only things into which he indulged his senses were perhaps the intake of cocaine and violin playing.

Nietzsche in his *The Birth of Tragedy* has used terms like the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian*, directly imported from Greek culture. According to him, the rational individual mind of a man is *Apollonian* in character; all forms of ecstatic and chaotic emotions are, however, *Dionysian* in nature. Music, for instance, is a *Dionysian* form of art as it directly relates to a man's instinct rather than his rational mind. Sherlock Holmes, on the one hand, is a man of whom his closest companion Watson in *A Scandal in Bohemia* says: "All emotions…were abhorrent to his cold precise but admirably balanced mind." (Doyle, *Classic Sherlock Holmes* 161). On the other hand, this "balanced" character often indulges in the sensations of cocaine and frequent violin playing. Moreover, in Nietzsche's view, the proper blend of these two binary oppositions lead to the best form of artistic creation. And perhaps because Holmes could possibly reconcile these dichotomies within his character, that he could transcend their apparent distinctions and perfectly create a world where he could connect with the collective criminal minds all alone. Perhaps, that is the reason behind his subjecting a major part of the deduction process to phases of deep thinking in complete isolation. We usually find Holmes playing over his violin, distressing its chords, deriving out unfamiliar tunes, late at night, whenever he runs clueless in a murder mystery. Nietzsche states that music directly connects to the chaotic mind and when a person is alone he turns toward his *Dionysian* character – in that state it is not his rational (*Apollonian*) self that works. Instead, his passionate disordered nature comes into play, when he seems to be so "intoxicated" as to be able to experience a connection with the collective. The research thesis would try to locate this blend of *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* dichotomies that seems to have merged within the character of Sherlock Holmes, and how we can possibly theorize the fact that nearly after every night of secluded violin playing, Holmes reaches the desired conclusion.

Nietzsche's notion of the "will to power" is sometimes viewed as a response to Schopenhauer's "will to live". Schopenhauer regarded that the entire universe is driven by a will to live and subsequently avoid death and procreate. Sherlock Holmes lives for his profession – it is not only a job for him, it is the means for his survival. We find accounts of how Holmes sinks deep into mental depressions whenever there is a lack of "interesting" criminal activities in London. It is then that Holmes injects himself with doses of cocaine to give his mind some "activity". The deductive reasoning which he uses to solve a case is a child born every time out of the labyrinth of his mangled thoughts. Holmes is driven by such a "will to live" a purposeful life, which can make him avoid "death" (intake of cocaine and temporary suspension of senses) and give "birth" to a product of his super-mind, whenever there is a threat of crime in England (or rather Europe, at large).

Nietzsche, however, challenges Schopenhauer's account and suggests that people want power and this quest for or "will to power" makes them promote one's power over the other.

This concept would be traced in the proposed thesis as how Holmes promotes his mental power over Watson: after all, why does he need Watson all the time? Is it only for the want of companionship? Or, rather, is it that the "Superman" needs a perfect foil to his character – the good natured Watson, to whom he can make enigmatic remarks and claim applauds (if not literally) which would accentuate his magnanimous ego. In turn, Watson would narrate his detective exploits and pen them down to popularise his friend among the "naïve" readers, who are otherwise unable to access the magnitude of his mind-set.

Sigmund Freud was the first to use the technique of encouraging a mental patient to talk freely in order to bring out his repressed thoughts and feelings into consciousness, and cure him of his illness. Freud's theory of the id-ego-superego can be used to analyse Holmes' methods of interrogating suspects, and how through the play of language and less physical action, he often succeeds in unmasking the culprit. Barbara Low in the book *Psycho – Analysis : A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory* has talked about the Freudian term "Pleasure Principle" from a different angle. An individual seeks to derive pleasure for himself out of every aspect of life. But sometimes, in order to accentuate the amount of pleasure derived from a given situation, the individual inflicts pain upon himself to give his passion a more intensified form. Holmes' infliction of self pain through injecting himself with doses of cocaine can be attributed to this sadistic principle. Low also argues that more than the "Pleasure principle" what lies deeper within this source of self pain is the "Nirvana Principle" – "the desire of the newborn creature to return to that stage of omnipotence, where there are no non-fulfilled desires, in which it existed within the mother's womb." (Low, *FreudianTheory* 73). But, man has to live a social life bounded by the norms of civilization. So, the individual decides to abide by the "Reality Principle", as "life based solely on the Pleasure-principle is impossible except in a state of isolated oneness." (Low, *Freudian Theory* 76).

**SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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